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A Review and Criticism of  
Contemporary English and  
American Pragmatism

Graduate School

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A REVIEW AND CRITICISM OF  
CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH AND AMERICAN PRAGMATISM

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BY

MARY EDITH CLARK, A. B., 1899

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THESIS

For the Degree of Master of Arts  
in Philosophy

IN THE

GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

Mary Edith Clark, A.B., 1899

ENTITLED

A Review and Criticism of  
Contemporary English and American Pragmatism

IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

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A REVIEW AND CRITICISM  
OF  
CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH AND AMERICAN PRAGMATISM.

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Probably no subject is more discussed among philosophic thinkers to-day than pragmatism. Its importance must be generally recognized if for no other reason than that many of the most prominent thinkers are among its advocates. I shall undertake no systematic account of this movement for it has not yet reached the proportions of a system. My purpose is simply to discuss some of its most important aspects as they are set forth in contemporaneous writings. I shall confine this discussion to the writings of leading English and American pragmatists, though it must be borne in mind that this is a widespread movement and that some of its most able advocates are to be found in France and Germany. It cannot be called a new doctrine. It is merely a shifting into the focus of consciousness of elements that were always present.

Pragmatism as defined by Peirce in 1879 is the method of science. It is a rule for attaining clearness in thought and for determining the value of conceptions. The term is variously understood by those who use it and a brief consideration of the different points of view may help us better to realize the peculiar problems of this doctrine. The conception as originally<sup>1</sup> enounced is this: "Consider what effects that might conceivably have practical bearings we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our

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1. JO. Vol.I. p.673.



conception of the object. Thus to develop a thought's meaning we need only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce; that conduct is for us its sole significance. There is no difference of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference in practice."

Such a rule is easy of application and if it is a true principle of the theory of knowledge, promises speedy and certain results. But its usefulness depends on whether it works, whether a possible difference in practice will account for the truth of everything that we hold true. That Peirce regarded it merely as a maxim - a working hypothesis rather than as an ultimate principle is evident from his later writings. "The<sup>1</sup> doctrine appears to assume that the end of man is action: If it, on the contrary, be admitted that action wants an end and that end must be something of a general description, then the spirit of the maxim itself, which is that we must look to the upshot of our concepts in order rightly to apprehend them, would direct us toward something different from practical facts, namely, to general ideas, as the true interpreters of our thought. The only ultimate good which the practical facts to which the maxim directs attention can subserve is to further the development of concrete reasonableness; so that the meaning of the concept does not lie in any individual reactions at all, but in the manner in which those reactions contribute to that development." This later statement defines a position to which Peirce gives the name pragmatism or synechism. The meaning of pragmatism as first expressed by Peirce is retained by Prof. James, who expresses it more broadly: "The<sup>2</sup>

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1. Dictionary of Philosophy Vol.II. p.322. 2. Jo. Vol.I. p.674.





effective meaning of any philosophic proposition can always be brought down to some particular consequence in our future practical experience, whether active or passive, the point lying in the fact that the experience must be particular, than in the fact that it must be active. I myself have only used the term pragmatism to indicate a method of carrying on abstract discussion. All that the pragmatic method implies is that truths should have practical consequences. In England the word has been used more broadly to cover the notion that the truth of any statement consists in the consequences and particularly in their being good consequences. Here we get beyond affairs of method. And since my pragmatism and this wider pragmatism are so different and both are important enough to have different names, I think Mr. Schiller's proposal to call the wider pragmatism by the name of Humanism is excellent and ought to be adopted. The narrower pragmatism may still be spoken of as the pragmatic method." The Humanism of the Oxford school is a revival of 'man the measure of all things'.<sup>1</sup> "It takes man for granted as he stands, and the world of man's experience as it has come to seem to him." It is a recognition of the primacy of the will in all human experience. "Thought"<sup>2</sup> with its fruits is an expression of interest, and the will which evinces and realizes such an interest is more original and significant than that which the thinking defines. Such a view attaches peculiar importance to the springs of conduct, and in its more systematic development, i.e. Fichte, has regarded ethics as the true propaedeutic of philosophy."<sup>3</sup> "Pragmatism

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1. Schiller's Humanism p.XVII.

3. Humanism p.XXI.

2. Perry's Approach to Philosophy p.151.



is the application of Humanism to the theory of knowledge. If the entire man, if human nature as a whole, be the clue to the theory of all experience, then human purposiveness must irrigate the arid soil of logic."

This brings us to the functional view of cognition of Prof. Dewey. That all our mental life is teleological in character is the contention of the 'Chicago school'. This view emphasizes the instrumental character of cognition. Truth and reality are relative terms. The validity of a thought depends on its fitness for effecting a transition from a conflicting experience to a relatively stable one.

We may say that pragmatism is an extension of the principle of evolution to the field of logic and metaphysic. Such conceptions as thought, existence, truth, reality, consciousness are relative to other terms in a movement, development, evolution. The ultimate thing is the experience. From its modest beginning as the method of science pragmatism has engendered some new problems and made necessary a restatement of old ones. The influence of will upon the determination of reality, the problem of truth and error, environment, consciousness, experience,- all these have a new interest in the light of recent discussion. If the pragmatic method seems best to meet the needs of those writers who call themselves radical empiricists, it may be interesting to inquire whether a pluralistic doctrine such as radical empiricism, is the logical outcome of that method, also whether it is possible to avoid solipsism. We may consider the problem of Peirce, whether action or rationality is the goal of evolution.

As it is used to-day pragmatism is recognized as something





not distinctly new. Mr. Schiller looks to Protagoras as the formulator of the humanistic doctrine of 'man the measure of all things'. Kant gives us some suggestions of pragmatic doctrine. Fichte has worked out systematically the primacy of the will in all experience. Prof. James says that he is only carrying out the conception of Locke who was the first to use the pragmatic method. Prof. James here seems to confuse the pragmatic method with empiricism. There is great danger of over-interpretation in such studies and so we will not consider pragmatism historically. We are chiefly interested in trying to tell what it is, rather than what its ancestry may have been.

There has been thus far, no expression that satisfies one's conjecture as to what philosophic system the pragmatic method may define. Prof. James says: "If<sup>1</sup> the formula ever becomes canonical it would certainly develop both right-wing and left-wing interpreters." As yet the movement has not crystallized into its final form either in England or in America. The general character of one's philosophy depends on his attitude toward life. His reaction to experience determines what sort of a world-view will give him the most satisfaction. If we believe that the purpose of all thought and action is more action, we may accept pragmatism as a true evaluation of the meaning of experience. But if we hold that our conscious life aims at something not different from itself, at a rational and harmonious interpretation of the data of experience, not for the difference it makes in our conduct but for the intellectual satisfaction it affords, we must then regard pragmatism as a practical rule, applicable up to a certain point

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1. Jo. Vol.II. p.114.



but not universally valid.

By common usage the radical empiricism of Prof. James is becoming so closely associated with the pragmatic method that we now call it the pragmatic position, ignoring the fact that Prof. Royce also uses the maxim of practical consequences in his discussions of Absolute Idealism. As a mere method for attaining clearness in thought it is difficult to see how any philosophic system could be evolved. Some other assumption is necessary. Prof. James conceives the world as an indeterminate pluralism, the clue to the reality of which can be found only in the immediate experience. "Pure experience" is the postulate of radical empiricism. Radical empiricism is the doctrine that immediate experience, just as it comes to us, contains in itself all the elements necessary for its own correction or confirmation. It is the reality to which we must return in all our inquiries; it is more ultimate than consciousness. Prof. James' accounts of this universal substance are rather confusing. "Pure"<sup>1</sup> experience is the name I give to the original flux of life before reflexion has categorized it. Only new-born babes, and persons in semicoma from sleep, drugs, illnesses or blows can have an experience pure in the literal sense of a that which is not yet any definite what, though ready to be all sorts of whats; full both of oneness and of manyness, but in respects that don't appear; changing throughout, yet so confusedly that its phases interpenetrate and no points, either of distinction or of identity can be caught. Pure experience, in this state is but another name for feeling or sensation."

This is the fundamental reality of Prof. James' world, a

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1. Jo. Vol.II. p.29.





world of such pristine purity that only infants and those whose minds have momentarily been freed from earthly relations can experience it. The world of the common man is not "pure experience". It is the world of interpretation of the sensations, which are considered as mere symbols. Man constructs his universe not out of sensations but in conformity with the clues which sensation gives him. It is to these constructs of his own activity that man attributes reality rather than to the flux and change of his own feelings.

Prof. James is obliged to assume a secondary sort of pure experience into which enter all the categories of thought and the individual purposes of the experient. "The<sup>1</sup> notion of a first in the shape of a most chaotic pure experience, which sets us questions, of a second in the way of fundamental categories long ago wrought into the structure of our consciousness and practically irreversible, which define the general frame within which answers must fall, and of a third which gives the detail of the answers in the shapes most congruous with all our present needs, is the essence of the humanistic conception,"

Thus any bit of pure experience includes the interpretation of the sensation not only in accordance with the laws of consciousness in general but also congruously with the interests and beliefs of the individual. Reality is that construction that is most in harmony with our own purposes. Not only our percepts but also our conceptual manifolds, memories, fancies are primarily bits of pure experience. As Prof. James expresses it: "The<sup>2</sup> instant field of the present is at all times pure experience, plain

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1. Mind Vol.XXIX. p.461.

2. Jo. Vol.I. p.485.



unqualified actuality or existence, a simple that."

The pure experience is not a judgment. There is no subject or predicate. Judgment and objectivity arise when there is a conflict of habits of reaction. Each experience, in the moment of its being is simple. There is no differentiation of thought and thing in that instant. That differentiation, if it comes at all, comes later when the unity of the experience is divided into two abstractions, the thought of an object and the object thought of. Consciousness is not a primary datum but something that comes by the analysis of a reality complete in itself.

Such a conception is in direct contradiction to the humanistic doctrine which denies any duality between reality and thought. According to Humanism thought does not somehow represent a reality that is independent of cognition. We are not aware of any reality except by its existence in our thought. We cannot get at reality except by knowing it. "We<sup>1</sup> know the Real as it is when we know it; we know nothing whatever about what it is apart from that process. When the mind knows reality both are affected as when a stone falls both it and the earth are attracted." Contrast this position with that of Prof. Dewey who says that there are many sorts of experiences - all real, and cognition is just one sort. Surely we have here a world of reality that is not known, although of course it may become so. In Prof. James' philosophy a later experience knows the former. The first experience is real when it 'is' i.e. during its one moment of being. After that it ceases to be. Radical empiricism gives us a system of realities outside our knowledge and independent of the knowing

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1. Humanism p.11.





function. Moreover we never know the reality. That is mutilated at thought's touch and breaks into pieces. Such a notion is tantalizing to the truth-seeker and satisfies us as little as Kant's thing-in-itself which it resembles in a surprising degree.

Before considering the nature of pure experience any further, it will be necessary to make clear the function of cognition as understood by the pragmatists. For no metaphysical problem can be settled independently of the epistemological one. The pragmatists emphasize the teleological character of thought. The unitary first experience becomes known only when it seems to involve two different modes of reaction. Thought arises in the effort to harmonize the conflict. It is the instrument for effecting a harmonious readjustment. As long as there is no uncertainty about the manner of discharge, experience flows along from moment to moment without any call for reflection. Consciousness is an addition to the reality of experience and has been introduced to explain the fact that things not only are but are known. But this condition of 'knownness' is better explained, according to radical empiricism, by the relations subsisting between things. And these relations are themselves experienced. There is a continuity actually felt between the experience known and the experience that knows it - a certain drift which, without break or gap points toward and may evolve into the 'knower'. Prof. James here seems to mean a temporal unity. But this feeling of the unity of experience does not come from the felt continuity. It depends on a unity thought into the process, on rationality.

Prof. James' account of the evolution of thought is as fol-



lows: "This 'pen' is, in its first intention, a bald that, a datum, fact, phenomenon, content, or whatever other neutral or ambiguous name you may prefer to apply. I call it a pure experience. Just what, from being 'pure', does its becoming conscious mean?

It means, first, that new experiences have supervened; and second, that they have borne a certain assignable relation to the unit supposed. Continue to speak of the pure unit as the 'pen'. So far as the pen's successors do but repeat the pen or being different from it, are 'energetically' related to it, it and they form a group of stably existing physical things. So far, however, as its successors differ from it in another well-determined way, the pen will figure in their context, not as a physical, but as a mental fact. It will become a passing 'percept', my percept of that pen. What now is that decisive, well-determined way?

The continuous identity of each personal consciousness is a name for the practical fact that new experiences come which look back on the old ones, find them 'warm' and greet and appropriate them as 'mine'. These operations mean when analyzed empirically, several tolerably definite things, viz:

1. That the new experience has past time for its 'content', and in that time a pen that 'was';

2. That warmth was about the pen, in the sense of a group of feelings, 'interest' aroused, 'attention' turned, 'eyes' employed, etc., that were closely connected with it and that now recur and evermore recur with unbroken vividness, though from the pen of now which may be only an image, all such vividness may have gone;





3. That these feelings are the nucleus of 'me';

4. That whatever was once associated with them was, at least for that one moment, 'mine' - my implement if associated with hand-feelings, my 'percept' only, if only eye-feelings and attention-feelings were involved.

The pen, realized in this retrospective way as my percept, thus figures as a fact of 'conscious' life. But it does so only so far as 'appropriation' has occurred; and appropriation is part of the content of a later experience wholly additional to the originally 'pure' pen. That pen, virtually both objective and subjective, is at its own moment actually and intrinsically neither. It has to be looked back upon and used, in order to be classed in either distinctive way. But its use, so called, is in the hands of the other experience, while it stands throughout the operation, passive and unchanged.

The next question is how an experience, originally pure, might conceivably enter into two minds. Obviously no new kind of condition would have to be supplied. All that we should have to postulate would be a second subsequent experience, collateral and contemporary with the first subsequent experience, in which a similar act of appropriation should occur. The two acts would interfere neither with one another nor with the originally pure pen. It would sleep undisturbed in its own past, no matter how many successors went through their several appropriative acts. Each would know it as 'my' percept, each would class it as a 'conscious' fact.

The paradox of the same experience figuring in two consciousnesses seems no paradox at all. To be 'conscious' means not simply to be, but to be reported, known, to have awareness of one's



being added to that being; and this is just what happens when the appropriative experience supervenes. The pen experience in its original immediacy is not aware of itself, it simply is, and the second experience is required for what we call awareness of it to occur.

Even although 'feeling only is as it is felt', there is still nothing absurd in the notion of its being felt in two different ways at once, as yours, namely, and as mine. It is indeed 'mine' only as it is felt as mine, and 'yours' only as it is felt as yours. But it is felt as neither by itself, but only when 'owned' by our several remembering experiences, just as one undivided estate is owned by several heirs.

A fact of consciousness exists but once and is a state. Its esse is sentiri; it is only so far as it is felt; and it is unambiguously and unequivocally exactly what is<sup>1</sup> felt."

The plausibility of this position arises from the ambiguity of the term experience. Experience without an experient is something so new that it certainly deserves a new name instead of trying to gain recognition for itself under such difficulties. Experience means a relation and it is not easy to understand the relation when there are no terms to be related. It involves the idea of subject and object, yet Prof. James' 'world-stuff' has neither.

But there are other difficulties than those arising from the previous meaning of the name. Pure experience has no existence, it simply is. After its one little moment of life it is succeeded by another experience. "It sleeps undisturbed in its own past."

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1. Jo. Vol. p.181.





Even such a statement is misleading for the experience does not even sleep. It has literally passed away. We should not say, then, that it 'stands passive and unchanged'. It has no such metaphysical existence. And in so describing it Prof. James treats experience as a sort of entity instead of as an event in an evolution.

The most serious difficulty is that 'pure experience' is entirely subjective. The individual can know only his own past states. The feeling of sameness between sensations is the origin of the knowledge experience. The first sensation is 'dumb' but a succeeding one finds the 'warmth' of the first and feels a relationship. This feeling of intimacy is the nucleus of the me. In other words it is aware of the first and calls it its own. The continuity of the transition from the first to the later experience is the essence of personal consciousness. But this continuity is not felt between minds. "There<sup>1</sup> is no obvious transition from one mind to another. You have to step off and get on again." So the pure experience cannot be felt as continuous between minds at all. To be known by different minds it would have to be a something existing outside the individual stream of consciousness which could be appropriated by any one. Even then there would be no felt 'warmth' because of which he could call it his 'own'. There is no continuous transition here. It would require a salto mortale to enter into conscious relations with such an absolute.

The notion that a feeling is neither yours nor mine except as it is so felt is absurd if it means that it exists as a disembodied feeling. A feeling is an event and that particular event can happen only in definitely determined relations to other

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1. Jo. Vol.I. p.684.



events in the series. It does not exist out of relation to the personal consciousness. A feeling may not be conscious that it belongs to me, yet as an unique feeling its character determines its owner. Another person cannot become conscious of it. Because the pure experience is 'dumb' as to its owner we cannot infer that it could become the content of the later experience of any one. My pure experience of the pen can no more become the content of your later experience than the pure pen can become a physical book. The pure experience is definite enough to determine what physical object will evolve and definite enough also, to determine whose experience it is. It was not a physical pen until the later experience supervened. Neither was it known as my experience until the later one. Yet it never could have belonged to anyone else when once the question of ownership was raised. "It is unambiguously and unequivocally exactly what is felt." It is felt as a step in a stream of consciousness which I term mine. Psychologically I never get outside that stream. The postulate of radical empiricism has no meaning outside the experience of the individual who uses it.

Prof. James' reference to the undivided estate is not pertinent. It would seem from this that the world is a dualism of subject and object, a theory which Prof. James seeks to refute. Moreover it is expressly stated that the estate is not unowned, as he affirms the pure experience is. Finally the question is not whether two or more minds know the same thing, but how they know it. And the 'undivided estate' does not give us any clue to the solution of this problem.

The inconsistency of this doctrine becomes clearer the more





one considers it. "Surely<sup>1</sup> all these, one time and on space, etc., were once definite conquests made at historic dates by our ancestors in their attempts to get the chaos of their crude individual experiences into a more shareable and manageable shape." Obviously the chaotic pure experience is not 'shareable'. It is not a 'that' of so indefinite a character that it may be appropriated by anyone. It is the experience of an individual.

Again Prof. James says: "If<sup>2</sup> one and the same experience can figure twice, once in a mental and once in a physical context, one does not see why it might not figure thrice or four times, by running into as many different mental contexts. Abolishing any number of contexts would not destroy the experience itself or its other contexts." Here we have the pure experience living its life unrelated to other bits of experience. It has an existence rather than an 'istence. Yet we have been told that pure experience is in a constant flux changing from moment to moment. In the account of how one mind knows, experience is a process. When two minds know one thing, experience is apparently an object. 'Pure experience' then seems to be not experience at all, but a permanent possibility of experience. This is quite a different thing from the 'continuous transition' actually felt and noted.

The anomolous character of pure experience is shown very clearly in Prof. James' treatment of space. His notion of how two minds can know one thing involves the notion of a real space in which the thing is. He seems to give to space an objectivity and independence quite above that of the things in it. "The dis-

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1. Mind Vol.XXIX. p.461.

2. Jo. Vol.I. p.566.



covery<sup>1</sup> of one Time and one Space." "The<sup>2</sup> receptacle of certain of our experiences being thus common." Now real space as a "single continuous receptacle" gives an ultimate duality of knower and thing known. Such common-sense realism is a good starting point for metaphysical inquiries but can never be a satisfactory conclusion.

"No points of difference appearing, they, your space and mine, would have to count as the same." This is begging the question, which is whether my mind knows your objects. Obviously if we can compare our objects we have already admitted that we can know them. So the "identity of indiscernibles" cannot help to prove the identity of your objects and mine.

The doctrine of the extension of ideas is an interesting bit of imaginative writing. "The<sup>4</sup> difference between objective and subjective extension is one of relation to a context solely. The two worlds differ, not by the presence or absence of extension, but by the relations of the extensions which in both worlds exist. The general group of experiences that act, comes inevitably to be contrasted with the group whose members, having identically the same natures, fail to manifest them in the 'energetic' way." One is tempted to ask how we know that their natures are the same since they act differently or we react to them differently. The foundation of pragmatism is that "Our<sup>5</sup> idea of anything is our idea of its sensible effects. What a thing means is simply what habits it involves." Now for a pragmatist to say

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1. Mind Vol.XXIX. p.461.

2. Jo. Vol.I. p.568.

3. Jo. Vol.I. p.568.

4. Jo. Vol.I. p.488.

5. Pop. Sc. Mo. Vol.XII. p.292.





that two things are the same but they act differently, is nonsense. If physical space is the 'real space', consistency seems to require that we call mental space unreal, that is, non-existent and that we no longer try to identify the natures of the two.

Pragmatism does not wish to commit itself to any statement regarding the nature of the causes that have determined experience as we know it now. It does not admit that there is any question of environment. It seems to think that the chaotic pure experience is the purely determinable. "Reality"<sup>1</sup> is an accumulation of our own intellectual inventions." One does not see how to interpret this other than as subjective idealism. If we have created the world out of nothing, it is difficult to imagine how the process started since in the beginning there was no definite situation needing adjustment. Cognition could never originate in an absolute chaos. The doctrine 'that nature is responsive to our choice' is undoubtedly true, the only question is, how far is it responsive? Pragmatism says that we can only find out by trying. "If nature suffers the addition" must mean that nature is not responsive unless we choose aright. She is independent of our wishes. "There"<sup>2</sup> is a push, an urgency, against which we are on the whole powerless." From such a statement it is difficult to see the difference between pragmatism and realism.

Pragmatism is undecided as to whether the limits are due to past experiences or to an "extra-experiential Ding-an-sich." This agnosticism toward the question of the ultimate nature of environment is characteristic of the pragmatic position that whatever

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1. Mind Vol.XXIX. p.462.

2. Mind Vol.XXIX. p.463.



makes no difference in the matter of conduct is a useless subject of dispute. It admits that experience has a definite character now, we cannot make of it just what we will, but this independence is due to past experience. For pragmatism, there is no extra-experiential Reality which determines our experiences. In a world where "experience and reality come to the same thing" there is no need of seeking outside our own or the racial experiences a clue to the understanding of those experiences.

It would seem that there could be little difficulty in stating the pragmatic conception of truth and reality. But there is considerable difficulty in trying to harmonize all that has been said. Prof. Dewey gives a very clear statement of what the radical empiricist means by truth and reality. Every experience is real; our dreams, our fancies, our "out and out illusions" as well as our experiences of mathematical truths are reals of precisely the same sort. One is not more real than another. What is unreal is non-existent, that is, it has never been experienced and so cannot possibly be a matter of concern to us.

From the point of view of the psychologist this is the nature of reality. As psychical events there can be no dispute about the reality of any and every experience. But such a conception is obviously solipsistic and is barren of any significance in logic or metaphysics where the endeavor is to eliminate the subjective factor. Though reality is met with only in individual experiences, yet there is an aspect of experience other than the subjective. The question of meaning cannot be settled without going outside the individual experience. This confusion of psychical reality with the reality of the logician has resulted





in much misunderstanding.

Prof. Dewey's experience of the half-awakened sleeper is undoubtedly a psychical real. But if, as Prof. Leighton suggests, he mistake a coil of hot pipes for a couch he would be inclined to assert that the first experience was not "as good a real as the self-luminous vision of an Absolute" because it was not as useful. What philosophy seeks to define is not the reality of mental states. No one questions that. The search is for that which will enable us to meet the future forearmed. We use the word to designate what we conceive to be the nature of our environment, whether physical, social or spiritual. That is real of which we must take account in our effort to adjust ourselves to the rest of the universe. Whatever forces us to reckon with itself, to that we attribute reality. That this reality is never met with except in individual experience is true, yet my individual experience does not constitute its reality in this larger sense.

Prof. Dewey calls that experience true which is most useful in defining our expectation. Reality resides in the immediate experience. Truth comes by a comparison of one experience with another by evaluating them congruously with our needs. Thus truth is not a static term. It evolves just as does reality. Everything real, whether being or relation is a matter of experience. There is no eternally constant Absolute - no fixed reality to which truth must conform.

Prof. James' use of the term real is so varied that it is difficult to state his idea. While accepting the conception of Prof. Dewey his use of the term is more like that of the common-



sense realist. Perhaps this is due to his desire to be untechnical but it certainly leads to confusion.

In the Experience of Activity Prof. James expresses the pragmatic conception of the identity of reality and experience. "Nothing<sup>1</sup> shall be admitted as fact except what can be experienced at some definite time by some experient. Everything real must be experienced, and every kind of thing experienced must somewhere be real. A philosophy of pure experience can consider the real causation as no other nature of thing than that which even in our most erroneous experiences appears to be at work." This is in accordance with Prof. Dewey. But what does he mean by "the<sup>2</sup> real experiences get sifted from the mental ones"? "An<sup>3</sup> experience must conform to reality in order to be true." The real world of physical things. "With<sup>2</sup> real objects consequences always accrue." "Reality<sup>4</sup> is an accumulation of our own intellectual inventions." This last would seem to indicate that pure experience is a symbol which suggests to us an interpretation. This interpretation is a product of the intellect - a notion at variance with the idea that reality is a postulate of the will. Again "By<sup>3</sup> reality humanism means nothing more than the other conceptual or perceptual experiences with which a given present experience may find itself in point of fact mixed up." This mixture of the realities of psychology, logic, common-sense and metaphysics in a philosophical discussion makes the pragmatic position rather vague. In general we may say that reality as the pragmatist conceives it is independent of our individual thought

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1. Psy. R. Vol.XII. p.3.

2. Jo. Vol. I. p.489.

3. Mind Vol.XXIX. p.474.

4. Mind Vol.XXIX. p.462.





but not of human thought. "To<sup>1</sup> say that our thought does not 'make' this reality means pragmatically that if our own particular thought were annihilated the reality would still be there, though possibly it might be there in a shape that would lack something that our thought supplies. That reality is 'independent' means that there is something in every experience that escapes our arbitrary control. There is a push, an urgency within our very experience against which we are on the whole powerless, and which drives us in a direction that is the destiny of our belief."

In the chapter on the 'Perception of Reality' Prof. James says that an object<sup>2</sup> must appear both interesting and important for our emotional and active life, to be real. We believe in the reality of those things that we need. So reality means value or the Good. Truth and reality have their origin in the will not in the intellect. We hold those things real which have an interest and value for us. It is only thus that they may become objects of our thought. As soon as their interest for us lapses their reality no longer has a claim on us. For us it does not exist. In moments of decision what seems better for our needs is believed real. Thus we can choose our reality. There is no absolute reality existing outside all experience, out of relation to our emotional nature. Reality is the valuation we put upon certain phases of experience which appear of most worth.

The pragmatic account of the origin of our notion of reality does not exhaust the meaning of that term for us. Its origin is in the individual experience but its meaning must transcend that.



The pragmatist says that whatever he desires to be real, of that he affirms reality and there is nothing else in our notion of reality. But experience shows us that man's nature is much more complex. He has many needs and the satisfaction of some of them is incompatible with that of others. He needs a standard to evaluate even his needs. Pragmatism gives no adequate account of the normative mode of thought.

One of the most fundamental needs is that of his social nature, that others shall see reality as he does. To satisfy this need he ignores many others. But the deepest need of all is for a reality that is independent of the individual or of society. So, even by the pragmatic test we find that reality is independent of subjective interests, for that is the sort of reality the individual needs. But such a conception refutes pragmatism. It is, in truth, the essence of Absolute Idealism.

Truth for the pragmatist is a relation subsisting, not between our thought and something external, but between different parts of our experience. Anything is true which is in harmony with the rest of our experience. One thing depends on another for corroboration but the world of experience does not depend on anything else. It is self-sufficient. Truth is not a copy of a reality that exists outside experience. It may be outside our own experience, "a legacy of the past" but it is a human creation. As individuals we do not make reality, we submit to it. But in the evolution of the race this permanent structure of reality has grown with the needs of the people. This "inherited" experience is the only reality to which truth must conform. The necessity which hems us in at all times is our need, coupled





with the relatively permanent structure of accumulated mental inventions. So we seem always to be driven - never free to choose one way of thinking rather than another. Thus arose the notion of a reality independent of experience to which truth must conform.

"Pragmatism is the doctrine that the whole meaning of a doctrine expresses itself in practical consequences, either conduct to be recommended or experience to be expected if the conception is true which would be different if it were untrue." Pragmatism holds that the only reason we desire to attain truth is that we may better foresee the future and adapt ourselves to it. All our thought activities are subordinate to some other end. While admitting that this accounts for the origin of thought, rationalism insists that the attainment of truth is its own reward. Most of the advanced scientific inquiry has for its sole aim the satisfaction of the intellect. Rationality, not action is the goal of man's endeavor.

The notion that 'truth must have practical consequences' seems unwarranted. The scientist must assume that there is a truth apart from its effect on conduct. He cannot determine the truth of his theory by waiting until he finds what difference it would make in conduct. It is not obvious just what difference in our conduct many of the truths of higher mathematics make. Science, too, has made discoveries of truth that have not yet been found useful. In view of these facts pragmatism has modified its conception of truth, and, while still maintaining that utility is the origin of the truth experience, it admits the just claims of those truths that have been discovered in the search for mere



intellectual satisfaction. Thus 'useful' now means not 'conduct' alone but intellectual activity. It is recognized that one of man's activities is thinking. "An<sup>1</sup> intrinsic interest in the bare describing function has grown up. We wish accounts that shall be true, whether they bring collateral profit or not." Here pragmatism recognizes that intellectual activity is not a means but an end in itself. Pragmatism attempted to deny any intellectual needs apart from the emotional and active needs. But this did not give due consideration to the scientific love of truth for truth's sake. The last quoted statement from 'Humanism and Truth' admits the existence of a truth independent of the subjective factor of interest. And this is the contention of Absolute Idealism which pragmatism aims to supplant.

"A<sup>2</sup> fact and a theory have not different natures, the one being objective, the other subjective. They are both made of the same experience-material and their difference relates to their way of functioning solely. It is 'fact' when it functions steadily; it is theory when we hesitate." It may be admitted that a true theory and a false one are not different subjectively considered. Their difference is in their objective reference. But on the merely subjective side there is no question of truth. We need to distinguish between the merit of a theory and my holding a theory true. A theory may deserve to be believed even when no one believes it. By truth we mean the claim of a proposition to be believed. I am not able to make a theory false or true by my rejection or acceptance. The law of gravitation "functions steadily" no matter whether I accept it or "hesitate" to accept it.

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1. Mind Vol. XXIX. p.470.

2. Psy. B. Vol.I. p.4.





A philosophy of pure experience should consider the physical world of the same rank as the mental. My thought of an event has not more reality than the physical event. It is a fallacy to consider my truth experience valid and not to consider the fact to which it points valid in the same degree.

The whole discussion is the problem of Hume over again - whether we are justified in making any assumption regarding the meaning of our changing states of consciousness. Even if there were a reality outside experience, pragmatism says, we can know nothing of it and therefore truth for us is merely a relation subsisting between our thoughts. The remark of Prof. Taylor is a pertinent criticism upon this position. "Though<sup>1</sup> true propositions are, so far as we know, only thought by individual minds, yet the notion of an individual thinking mind is absolutely irrelevant to the explanation of what we mean by their truth. The truth of a proposition is a function of its meaning, not of its character as a psychological event or process."

It may be interesting to note the similarity of the pragmatic position and positivism. The doctrine of cause as expressed by Prof. James might have been written by Hume. "A<sup>2</sup> philosophy of pure experience can consider the real causation as no other nature of thing than that which even in our most erroneous experiences appears to be at work." A criticism of this view of cause is unnecessary in this paper, as it would lead us too far into the history of philosophy. But we may say in general that human thought makes a distinction between a psychic event and the meaning of that event. The question of truth does not apply to



the former. Much of the present-day discussion and misunderstanding has been due to a confusion of the notions.

If truth is what a man 'troweth' with the greatest satisfaction to himself, there is no sense in talking of error. Error could only be some thought that had satisfied him at some other time or had satisfied some one else. The criterion of satisfaction would involve an infinite number of 'true' judgments about the same thing at the same time. Such a view of the nature of truth does not give the maximum of 'satisfaction' and so may be considered untrue unless it happens to please one to think in that way.

One does not see how to reconcile the pragmatic position and certain statements in the article, Humanism and Truth. "Pragmatically,<sup>1</sup> virtual and actual truth mean the same thing. A fact virtually preexists when every condition of its realization save one - in this case the thinking mind - is already there. The stars themselves dictate the result - of the counting. Something comes by the counting. Yet that something was always true." How can we interpret this other than that truth is true no matter whether it exists in the mind of some individual or not? If this is so, pragmatism and Absolute Idealism do not differ in their conception of the nature of truth.

Before giving an estimate of the value of pragmatism we will consider briefly some aspects of the movement in England. Mr. Schiller is the avowed champion of the doctrine there and may be considered the founder of the 'Oxford School'. His volume of essays entitled 'Humanism' will be the basis of this re-





view.

Mr. Schiller gives the name, Humanism to his doctrine which is somewhat broader in its claims than the radical empiricism of Prof. James and Prof. Dewey. Mr. Schiller's discussions are largely concerned with the nature of truth and reality. The basis of his epistemological and metaphysical doctrines is ethics. Radical empiricism has said there is no truth or reality outside the individual human experience. Humanism goes further and makes purpose the essence of truth and reality. There can be no knowledge apart from a desire and attempt to know. Reality is the affirmation of our volitional nature. There is no unknown reality, no undiscovered truth. The human element is necessary to make reality real.

Every human activity is purposive in character. Truth and reality are the useful aspects of experience. Truth means true from what point of view, real for what purpose. There is no thing- in-itself. Everything that 'is' is tinged with self-interest. Pure intellection is a fiction; it does not exist in our world. "Our knowing is driven by our interests."

It is true that we 'know' because we need to. Yet humanism fails to show why we need some things and not others. Surely this points to some sort of correspondence or relation between our needs and reality, that is not entirely dependent on the human will. May not reality determine our needs as logically as our needs reality? And is not that what we mean by reality - that it determines facts?

<sup>1</sup>  
"Truth" is that manipulation of objects which turns out upon



trial to be useful, primarily for any human end, but ultimately for that perfect harmony of our whole life which forms our final aspiration." Humanism thus assumes that rationality is the goal of human endeavor. All our activity is based on the faith that human action makes a difference in the reality of the universe. "At<sup>1</sup> bottom rationality itself is the supremest postulate of Faith and the demands of 'Faith' must be as reasonable as those of the 'Reason' they pervade." There is really little meaning in this statement. If faith postulates rationality it is nonsense to speak of the reasonableness of faith in postulating it. Moreover we may question the statement that Rationality is a postulate of Faith. Genetically at least, we could not say that it is. The infant does not have an innate faith out of which develops his craving for rationality. Such a doctrine would imply a faculty of believing. There is no reason to believe that faith is prior to rationality. Both are elements of our psychic life and should be considered of equal rank.

Humanism emphasizes the individual experience. 'Man is the measure of all things.' If we take the individual man's experience as the criterion this doctrine is solipsistic and pragmatism should claim no affinity with it. For an individual standard gives no basis for ethics or conduct, which is the ultimate category for pragmatism. If, on the other hand, by 'man the measure of all things', pragmatism means humanity, we are dealing with an abstraction and the boast of humanism is empty.

For most of us experience has no meaning if it does not involve a reality that is not purely subjective and individual.

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Reality is not entirely anthropomorphic. It does not depend entirely on the theory of knowledge. "If<sup>1</sup> we question Nature amiss" implies a determinate character to which our human truth must conform. If it were otherwise why "must" we "try again"? It is subjective idealism to say that value determines truth. The truth is valuable to us not because it happens to be in line with our interests but because it is independent of our wishes or those of any one else. Truth conditions value, not value truth. In his search for truth the scientist endeavors to eliminate the subjective factor. If metaphysics ever becomes a science it must have some more stable basis than the changing interests of the individual.

Mr. Schiller starts from a basis of individual experience but slips into the notion of human experience as if humanity as a whole had a concrete experience. His notion of conduct as the basis of the True and the Real becomes transformed into the concept of the Good. Yet the category of the Good is not a fact of experience. The Good, in this sense, is a metaphysical reality, it is not conduct. Nor can we say that it is more fundamental than Truth and Reality. Such a doctrine is individualistic; and those concepts, if they have any meaning are universals. The exaltation of the individual and the degradation of truth and reality to mere creatures of his passing interest can lead only to skepticism.

Much of the humanistic doctrine is a quibble over words and a striving to get hold of something new. There is also much misunderstanding of other points of view. The humanist assumes that

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1. Humanism p.11.



usefulness is the test of truth and then accuses the idealist of inconsistency because he holds that there is a truth that does not depend on human interest.

Moreover humanism itself conceives "the<sup>1</sup> immediate experience as a symbol" of something ulterior. Why need we say that the 'something' is just more human experience? The immediate experience must always be the basis of our notion of reality but it is not 'reality'. And since humanism itself goes beyond the immediate experience in its interpretation of the symbol, are we not justified in holding that reality is more than human experiences?

In drawing our conclusions concerning pragmatism we must bear in mind that, as yet, it is only a movement, and it is impossible to estimate its value before we know what final form it will take. We can only indicate its tendencies so far as they reveal themselves. The doctrine seems full of contradictions, but there has not yet been any systematic exposition of its principles. Perhaps in Prof. James' long-awaited Metaphysics all the inconsistency will be smoothed away. Thus far either he has not succeeded in making himself understood or else his doctrine has some radical inconsistencies which will need eliminating before pragmatism can claim to be a philosophic system.

The previous discussions indicate the general criticism to be made upon pragmatism. Starting with the method of science it attempts to formulate a logic and metaphysic. But the method and the assumptions of psychology do not fit the problems of metaphysics any more than did the propositions and demonstrations of geometry in the Cartesian system. Metaphysics is unique, and can-

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1. Humanism p.193.





not borrow her method from others without committing herself to assumptions that make impossible the solution of her problems. For psychology the individual experience is the final word in questions of truth, reality and goodness. But a system of philosophy committed to such a principle cannot escape subjective idealism. And it is unnecessary to consider the unsatisfactoriness of such a position.

Pragmatism makes the mistake of thinking that telling the origin of our notions of truth and reality explains what they are. But the philosophic wonder is not so easily satisfied. Positivism will never be popular . We like to speculate about the nature of the 'beyond', and a philosophy which ignores that problem does not fulfill its calling. An agnostic philosophy is a contradiction in terms. Moreover the persistence of the metaphysical disposition from the earliest ages points to its utility in the evolutionary process in some way. Pragmatism must give an expression to its conception of what determines human experience. Its doctrines do not seem capable of being interpreted monistically . There are really two terms although pragmatism has given an account of only one.

Pragmatism justly emphasizes the element of faith in all human activity. But it seems rather inconsistent to rail at Absolute Idealism for its faith in the ideals of truth and reality. Faith is an ingredient of all our interpretations of the given. We can only postulate the uniformity of nature. The difference between science and philosophy is not in the presence or absence of faith. Since all human knowledge is the fruit of the 'will to believe' pragmatism should be the last to give up faith in a



reality not 'known'.

Pragmatism is valuable in that it emphasizes the reality of the immediate experience. The tendency of rationalism has been to eliminate from philosophy the more changing aspects of experience, making reality synonymous with universality. Locke, although an empiricist, does not regard all experience of equal reality. Color, sound, taste and smell are almost entirely subjective. The pragmatist is right in saying that, as experiences, they are just as real as form and extension. It is in the immediate experience that we must find the origin of reality. But this does not prevent our attributing an even higher reality to our interpretation of the immediate experience. Humanism is inclined to over-emphasize the importance of the will and the emotions in this interpretation. Moreover this need of interpreting the unsatisfactory immediate experience is characteristic of idealism rather than the realism to which pragmatism claims relationship.

The continual emphasis on the purposive character of thought, truth, reality and consciousness suggests the question of whither does this evolution tend. The pragmatist cannot consistently place his goal outside the process. We find suggestions of panpsychism scattered through Prof. James' and Mr. Schiller's writings, and it is along that line that we may expect pragmatism to develop.

That tendency in pragmatism, which we have criticised most severely is also the phase most worthy of praise. Its individualistic implications, when carried to the extreme, are untenable. But they represent a healthy reaction against the extreme ration-





alism of the Neo-Hegelians. Intellectualism had ignored the feelings and will. Pragmatism tends to ignore the intellect. Whatever our ultimate system of philosophy may be, it must give due consideration to every phase of man's life. Neither rationalism nor pragmatism does this.

Prof. James' work is valuable from the standpoint of descriptive psychology, but as a system of philosophy it is lacking in breadth. The multiplicity of detail is not unified into any system. The business of philosophy is with generalizations. The local and the accidental must be ignored. This is true, in a degree, of all our thinking. We think with concepts rather than with percepts. The highest generalization possible is the goal of our thought. Though philosophy may lack in the freshness of its material, yet it deals with reality in that it is an attempt to satisfy our very real need of a rational universe.

Pragmatism is a doctrine for the young. It is a philosophy of activity, of striving and accomplishing, of satisfying our needs and of making the universe conform to our desires. Man is greater than all else, and his will rules all that can enter into his life.



## ABBREVIATIONS.

Jo. = Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods.

Phil. R. = Philosophical Review.

Pop. Sc. Mo. = Popular Science Monthly.

Psy. B. = Psychological Bulletin.

Psy. R. = Psychological Review.

Vol. = Volume.

p. = page.





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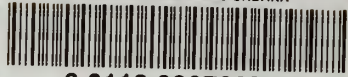
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